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CIA helped pilot defect, report says

Associated Press

TOKYO — CIA agents in Moscow set up the dramatic 1976 defection flight of a Soviet pilot, the Kyodo news agency said yesterday in a report quoting Japanese security officials.

The report said the CIA promised the pilot political asylum if he flew out of the Soviet Union in his MiG-25 Foxbat, a high-speed fighter plane that the United States wanted to study.

The pilot, Lt. Viktor Ivanovich Belenko, flew the plane from Siberia to the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido on Sept. 6, 1976. After he arrived there, he disclosed what had led to his defection in testimony to Japanese police, Defense Agency and Foreign Ministry officials, Kyodo said.

The news agency did not identify the security officials quoted in its report.

Asked to comment on the report, CIA spokesman Dale Peterson said in Washington, "That is a topic we would not comment on one way or the other. We would not comment one way or the other on any allegations of operational activity."

Eighteen hours after Belenko arrived, U.S. experts arrived on Hokkaido to inspect the Foxbat, which is considered one of the world's fastest weapons-carrying fighters and interceptors.

Kyodo said the military experts were interested in the advanced technology found in the MiG-25, including metallurgical techniques used in manufacturing the plane, its fuel-injection system and its complex radar and missile systems.

The Soviet pilot, who was 29 when he defected and was the commanding officer of a flight unit, defected by making a sudden dive during a routine training mission and eluding the pursuit of pilots under his command.

He was granted political asylum by Washington and left for the United States three days after he arrived on Hokkaido.

Kyodo quoted the security sources as saying that a British espionage agent first approached Belenko in a Moscow beer hall in October 1974. It said the Soviet pilot was later in contact with four or five CIA agents in Moscow before he was transferred to the Sokolovka air base in Siberia toward the end of 1975.

At meetings in Moscow parks and other places, the CIA promised Belenko he would be granted political asylum in the United States if he brought a fully equipped MiG out of the Soviet Union, Kyodo said.

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